

Message Text

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AMCONSUL DHAHRAN SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA

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UNCLAS MANAMA 2041

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS : BENC, ELTN, PFOR, BA, SA

SUBJECT : BAHRAIN-SAUDI CAUSEWAY PROJECT

REF : MANAMA 1877

1. THE GOVERNMENTS OF BAHRAIN AND SAUDI ARABIA APPEAR TO BE ORGANIZING THEMSELVES FOR AND INFORMING THEIR PUBLICS TO EXPECT AN EARLY 1978 TARGET FOR THE BEGINNING OF CONSTRUCTION ON THE LONG-DISCUSSED BAHRAIN-SAUDI CAUSEWAY, LINKING THE ISLAND OF BAHRAIN WITH THE EASTERN PROVINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA. THE COST OF THE PROJECT IS PUBLICLY NOW ESTIMATED TO BE AS MUCH AS \$800 MILLION AND WILL BE BORNE COMPLETELY BY THE SAUDIS.

2. THE SAUDI MINISTERS OF FINANCE AND COMMUNICATION VISITED BAHRAIN IN MID-NOVEMBER AND, TOGETHER WITH THEIR TWO BAHRAINI COUNTERPARTS, ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE AT THE END OF THE VISIT AND MADE SEVERAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES WHICH WERE GIVEN HEAVY PLAY ON BOTH BAHRAINI TELEVISION AND RADIO. THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD APPROVED THE BASIC DESIGN FOR THE CAUSEWAY WHICH HAD BEEN PREPARED BY THE DANISH CONSULTANTS. THE SAME FIRM HAS BEEN ASKED TO GO AHEAD WITH DETAILED DESIGNS, SPECIFICATIONS AND DRAWINGS. WHILE THE EXACT LOCATION OF CAUSEWAY IS BEING KEPT "CONFIDENTIAL" (TO AVOID LAND SPECULATION, WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN UNCLASSIFIED

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GREAT ON THE BAHRAINI SIDE), IT HAS BEEN DECLARED THAT THE

CAUSEWAY WILL BE FIFTEEN MILES IN LENGTH AND WILL CONSIST OF SOLID FILL AS WELL AS FOUR HIGH BRIDGE SPANS TO ALLOW FOR PASSAGE OF SHIPS AND PRESERVE THE NATURAL FLOW OF MARINE LIFE (THERE HAVE BEEN STRONGLY EXPRESSED ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE CAUSEWAY ON TIDES AND MARINE LIFE).

3. THE BAHRAINI MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIES, YUSUF SHIRAWI, STATED IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW RECENTLY THAT THE TWO STARTING POINTS "MAY BE" JASRA (IN BAHRAIN) AND KHALIJ SALWA (IN SAUDI ARABIA, SEVERAL MILES SOUTH OF DAMMAM). HE SAID FURTHER THAT BIDDING WILL TAKE PLACE IN 1977 AND THAT ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION WILL BEGIN IN EARLY 1978. IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THREE AND A HALF YEARS WOULD BE NEEDED FOR THE ENTIRE PROJECT.

4. INTERESTINGLY, SHIRAWI TOLD HIS BAHRAINI AUDIENCE THAT THE "SOCIAL PROBLEMS" ATTENDANT TO THE CAUSEWAY PROJECT HAVE BEEN CONSCIOUSLY IGNORED BY THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE. THEIR "ORDERS" HAVE BEEN VERY CLEAR: PROCEED WITH CONSRUCTION AND EVALUATE AND COPE WITH POSSIBLE PROBLEMS AS AND WHEN THEY OCCUR.

5. COMMENT: THIS WILL BE WITHOUT ANY DOUBT THE MAJOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECT IN BAHRAIN'S HISTORY. SINCE SAUDI ARABIA IS FUNDING IT, WE ASSUME THE MAIN ACTION ON TENDERS AND BID EVALUATION, ETC., WILL BE IN RIYADH. HOWEVER, SINCE THE PROJECT IS OF MORE INTEREST TO BAHRAIN THAN TO SAUDI ARABIA, SINCE THE IMPACT ON THIS SMALL COUNTRY WILL BE FAR GREATER, WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR DEVELOPMENTS AND REPORT AS AND WHEN THEY OCCUR. ANY COMMENTS, OF COURSE, FROM EMBASSY JIDDA AND/OR CONGEN DHAHRAN WOULD BE APPREIATED.

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